POETRY QUARTERLY

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EDITORIAL

A writer in a well-known literary weekly recently acknowledged the fact that a great deal of good poetry was being written today. The admission is significant. The reading public is waking up to the fact that these last years have produced new poets whose work reflects the great changes which have come upon us since the beginning of the war, and is at as high a level as anything we have had in the past. Only a few soured critics belonging to an older generation now dispute this fact. Among the young men writing now will be found the Shelley, the Keats, the Wordsworth of the poetic renaissance of the mid-twentieth century. Time marches always a step ahead of the self-satisfied pundit. Out of war comes suffering, and those who suffer sometimes sing the better for it.

We do not, however, wish to label poets, to become a clique, or the mouthpiece of a generation which turns its back on the lessons learned by its elders, to prevent those with whom we do not agree from stating their case. As we print the work of the known and the unknown, the mature poet and the very young side by side without after thought and only in respect of their interest as poems, so we include among our reviews many quite contrary to our own opinions. We feel that to thrash out the disagreements between the various critics fairly in print is the best service to poetry. The answer to criticism is not the sharp retort or the bitter invective of wounded vanity, but the work itself of the poet, who may be influenced by true comment but cannot be silenced by a valueless and unsympathetic remark.

The number of poems we print in each issue make it impossible to offer any reasonable payment to contributors, but we would like to give some tangible encouragement to those who, in these difficult times, are devoting the little leisure most of us are able to spare on the hard, unremunerative and elusive art of poetry. For the best poem in the four issues—Winter, 1943, Spring, Summer and Autumn 1944—we offer prizes of Five Guineas, Three Guineas and One Guinea, and a Consolation Prize of any book published by The Grey Walls Press. Our subscribers themselves will be the judges, but anyone who has bought the four numbers and will send us a written declaration to that effect is also eligible as a voter. All votes, which must be for one poem only, must reach this office by November 15th of this year, and the result will be given in the Winter issue published January 1st, 1945.

ALEX COMFORT

Folksong for Myself

Hawthorn tree, green hawthorn tree—
do you hear me, my enemy?

the valleys fill
with green shadows
the river runs
like a green soul
do you hear me, my enemy?

and the sea lying
a swinging harp
white hills of pebbles
white strong cattle—
in your helmet the same green—

hawthorn tree, green bud, green spray:
can you hear me, my enemy?

You are the shore stones
limpets your helmets cling
the sea between us
on a clear day I can see you move
—in your helmet the same green—

Lazarus and Lazarus
watching each other's feast . . .
on a clear day your tall white clock
set on the rind of land:
can you hear me, my enemy?

everywhere through our lives
root bloodstained Gadarenes
blood fills their little eyes
squealing out Liberty
—in your helmet the same green—

squealing 'Obedience!'
one day we will kill them
one day we will kill them
do you hear me, my enemy?

Hawthorn tree, white lover,
what do the dead know of summer?

and we will kill them
and we will not die
(how to reach your hand . . .?)
ever again . . .

G. S. FRASER

The Time

The time demands a rolling eye,
Demands an indecisive gesture,
Demands a slithering journalist's look,
Pinned to no point, but quick for all,
Demands the most extended concept
Of pain, or politics, or cities
And screams against intensities,
Calls out with its names of cities
Our minds to be where we are not,
Our pain to be other than our own:
The time, a bit aside from any
Point we did intend to make,
Crushed our conversations with
Its cruder moral argument. The time,
Like a delator, denounces:
Is a spy in the heart. Has its
Intimate horrors (like a schoolmaster
Denouncing masturbation), assures us
If we take our eyes for a second
Off the ball, we shall soon turn
Into Hitler or De Sade. It has
So many knives, so many slogans,
So many things to die for—and death

Is not enough, unless you die
For exactly the right slogan—
And considers immoral all
Mere incentives to live. The time
Is sly, malicious, has an evil eye.
A glib and abstract time. I hate
The time; I would desire to
Have time, in time, to live without
The crushing weight of purposes
They say everything must be done
And nothing properly. I would wish . . .
But those who ride wishes like horses
Find when they come to take their fences
Their bottoms fall with a hard bump
On the cold stone ground.

The time
Demands so much, a nagging woman,
Denouncing our impotence, or else
Our salaries, our hobbies, and our friends,
That we forget its own false promises
And that we should be masters of the time.

DEREK STANFORD

Poem for the Night of the First of Spring

TO E. F.

There have been Spring nights when my life has lain
as useless as a lost broach in the gutter;
nights when the aimless moth-blood burned away
reflected in the leper-face of street-lamps;
or when the raven trees sighed 'Nevermore',
Too many nights, barren and beautiful.

Leaving the white-tiled corridor of winter
between the hospital months where the starved air
ekes dimly out in the grey ward of days
to saunter again, sun-up, on limpid lawns,
I thank you deeper than these show-case words,
like gold-fish in the cramped seas of a bowl,

for that one cup of wine whose memory writes
its reeling praise for this night of the first of Spring.

The stars were bees escaped from the hive of the sky:
I kissed your breasts and the stars entered my blood.
Darkness surrounded the room like a lake of willows,
and the house cast anchor away and sailed on the tide
of night that rinsed against the window-pane,
and laid its seaweed on the basking roof,
as these hands flowered upon your April hills.
And leprachauns below the forest fern,
under dead leaves far from the hiss of rain
and whip of wind that stings the sapling flesh
creasing the blue skin of the hyacinth,
rose up between my fingers in your hair;
fled through the waves like an electric scent
An ocean in the hammock of the moon,
soothed by the fin-tipped, lisping, mermaid stars,
lapped gently in the hollow of your breasts.
Alone, I travelled here its silver tundras.

At length the violet spaces of the night
converging, changed now to a flower's bell,
imprisoned me in its transparent cup,
and drew me down the filmy shafts of stem
to rest with you beneath the fondling roots:
a pair of white seeds in the earth of sleep.

Daylight was cold, but evening thawed the air
with rose and saffron smoke across the sky.
And we explorers strolling in the streets
beneath the clusters of pale primrose stars
found overnight Spring had remade the city;
for lemon groves grew up beside the curb
with perfume like a promise from their flowers.
How other could the brick and stone have blossomed
with half-lit traffic gliding under the moon
like moving gardens shod with velvet wheels?

Yet night must end, and separation take
the stars in philtre from the pierrot blood.
I stand and watch the disappearing tram.
. . . but even now I hear the fountains play.

IAIN FLETCHER

For My Cousin Lorna, God Keep Her

There's a girl in Germany like a Princess in a tower
With a gold slow deluge of hair.
We climbed each pear-tree in the park.

She knew the highest bough and could,
Neater than wood-doe, wild-heart in the wood
Race me through paddocks to the crocus bed.

But now the trees are cut, now winter's come
With Europe one long barrow of the dead.
Letters which inclined meek words are dumb.

There is no whisper arching to tell me where
You bury your slow torrent of gold hair,
Or if, wild-heart, you have run far enough
To escape the hunters without any mark.

Birthday Sonnet for K. M. F.

You were all mellow countries to my ears
My childhood wakings to a world of eyes,
My nights of fear, but days of certainties.
Having softly come to *Monica's* blessed years
I ask no sad translation to the skies,
That you may see me when the times mature
Leave the *Pelagians'* intellectual lure

And find my master *Ambrose*, and be wise

Your prodigal, who would gladly turn
From tending war's dull Gadarene swine
With a poor gift of presence you'd not spurn.

If gentleness continues with us still
You have our many prayers, and this is mine
You may live quiet through the nights of evil.

G. A. WAGNER

Collo

May I ask you to come with me
to the murmuring city populous of beliefs
where the heart is not hurt.

Clean as nets
the stars would be our first homes
and the moon
the quiet resting place of all women.

Even angels would be secure there.

Let us peer into the secret of Collo then,
life the flapping breeze
and walk to the most extreme edge
of this waterfront of life.

Where is danger here?
Where is the wreck to salvage?
Where is the subtle contention
of man against his neighbour?

Let us wreak with these feeling flying masts
a great and possible purpose,
that will wear
like the modelled and jutted doorsteps
of the heart of this people.

Let us fly the sun amongst these fans of cold.
Our shadow will avenge the sand,
our millenium will be
the quiet procession of each tideless day.
Our children creasing their faces
will feel ears tingle
to the continual ecstatic anthem of our love.

FRED MARNAU

The Death of the Cathedral

What came to us in stone,
when it kneels with battered
towers and the high cock lies
down to the crowns, storm on dust,
and the sad windmill-arms of God
extinguish the light and the text
which the mossy hand of the hundred years
had hidden as a rare thought,
suddenly forced open, stares
into the night. . . . And the shepherds' angel
for ever retraces the holy contours,
invisible to men, music of stars.

But we, when we awaken from our sleep,
who then knows the word we had forgotten
when suddenly in this flood we were drowned?
Where the grass, where the apple's purity,
where the storm that reigned in the forests,
where now the good rain, as we
sink forward and the fingers are wiry
and pierce the fruit, and the sharp
hairs know not what used to be and no-one
digs for the noble pitchers and no-one
builds tables, and we cower on the iron
scaffolding, at giddy heights, and fall
into the cloud speechless. The word burnt away
with the wood, the tears and the misdeed.

Question

The ant in the dark moss shall enjoy the blessing of your hands.
But the ant that seeks and finds and tries me!—Am I so humble then,
that which had only my pity, now rises, drives into me,
can embitter my heart, harass my brow and eclipse the sun?

(Translated by Ernst Sigler)

ERNST SIGLER

From *Letters to a Virtuoso*

IV

Note every presence of the immortelle:
how to the young its languid green
is haloed above the head of groping eyes:
the ever-kind for them who fear destruction always.

Nothing is easy to them whom each drop
of rain tears a broad scar in the earth.
Suck back the blood: but a pin can empty their veins.
Sleep, sleep: who drives them yelping up the Brocken?

The immortelle, patron of sanctum and scales,
observes how its calyx transcendents
the grasses out of which it came. Let us believe,
let us accept, do not attempt to follow

the expatriate's calm; it has found
a place where the sun heeds its word,
where there are servile tottering animals. For this
is the cupola of our prayers, a waste of bright heaven,

our acme of happiness, our good-night tale
repulsing death for the time of a dream.
Greatness returns to each life once more:
the immortelle's box contains all virtues

but hope; its metronome tempers every grace,
only no ending comes, the circle cannot
be completed, the numbers allow no escape.
Drums. Fanfares. Enthrone the deathless.

ROBIN ATTHILL

Rain

No olive leaf in this world of water;
but the rain drenching the windows, splashing
the threadbare leaves of the late autumn,
choking with gurgle and loud rush
the brimmed gutters and the streets awash;
no rainbow in this grey world.

Noah in his wooden sanctuary, between the stench
of breeding beasts and the muttered anger
of his sons, rode out the danger,
cursing his wife's sharp tongue,
while the ark plunged between the sodden peaks.

For all the cramped and sour darkness
of the long nights, this was life, this
was sweeter than the strange green kiss
of currents that swirled through drowned cities;
there was no warmth, no pity
in cold kingdoms of the buried seas.

Europe's rivers flood with rain that spurts
warm and red from the dear wounds
of such as I; which chokes the streets
with murdered beauty—your friends
and mine; all night its drumming grieves
our tortured sleep; by day the pain drives
at our face, at our feet, seeps into the soul;
until the whole world of heart and brain,
brute body and nerve is drowned
hell-deep in the despair of leaden rain.

JOHN BAYLISS

The Moon in Cancer

Cold rain that sweeps from coast to coast
through calloused mountain and defile,
that ravens at each sliding roof
and hammers at the plantain leaf,
that ruffles feathers at swan's breast
and breaks the heavy rose for spoil,—
such is the weather of the moon.

What sullen movement of the wind,
astrolabe or devil's dial,
brought out this flying mane of cloud?
Or in what cavern of the seas
delays the overburdened Crab
its swift ascent through coral skies ?

Beneath unfriendly influence
the wheat-heads fall and clash their blades
while flies breed in their colonnades
and cover up the rook's black death.
The winds ride down deserted glades
and the cold earth rejects the lover.
Infrequent suns rescind the flowers
and a new winter is begun.

This is the interim between
the early and the later heats,
cold region of uncertainty
possessed of quick inconstant hates;
and those about me, man or bird,
or animal or restless tree
shake in lethargic fury born
of impotence and so betray
a love or friendship to their harm.

For this is now a lull of time
when watch and sun are put away
and shadows merge into the wall
and twilight lengthens trivial dreams.

. . . . .

The poet walks by aerodromes
and talks with pasteboard queens that fight
in mockery of Courts of Love,
or officers grown dissolute
in forms of war annexed from sport.

The ageing hawk that flew in youth
here screeches battle from his perch
or preens his wings about the park;
and we, young fools that flutter by
look big and brag of victories
who see death with newspaper eyes
and flinch at light rain from the sky.

This is a school for acting, dying,
to learn procedure used in peace
from flying men who do no flying.

The pupils turn attentive face
who listen to the deeds of others,
fornicate or eat or sleep,
and flirt by shallow-flowing rivers
fatigued by showers and summer heat.

And here old men sit parcelling the day
while Squadrons split and scatter in the air
taught by their fathers not to live but die
in swift romantic chariots of fire.

I see their silver turn to scraps of metal
their glory soon forgotten and each man
cry out as hair and brittle body burn.

There comes an end to any kind of battle,
and this has broken as a pane of glass
or coloured soap-and-rainbow bubble.

Along wet roads the tanks and pipers pass
while at their heels excited children follow.
New victories give uniforms a gloss
and villagers begin to think alas
such fellows should go from us to the wars.

The moon rides up above these victories
and I who stand on Hadrian's great wall
look down upon the lough and shake my head
against the heavy doom of history.

What shall avail us that we fight to end
worse murder? Year upon dark year
the Romans killed in guarding these bare hills,
spilt blood upon this bare stone sweep of wall,
for Mithras or the Moon built temples here
and married or destroyed or died sharp death
only to inherit dust and heather
a lasting stone and this uneasy ditch.

The witch-lights laugh at you, small warriors,
look down upon the lough and see its rays,
and say if it was worth this later race
your bitter feud and fighting with the North.

A man may die well satisfied if hearth
and house stand square behind him and his wife
dies at his side where once she stood a bride,
yet which of us may fight so, or so well?

And over all the few birds wheeling, wheeling,
where broken walls betray a broken cause,
what creatures shall we leave behind us failing
our equal burden, lost in alien graves?

Dig graves for us, the moonlight and the heather
shall sight our barrow and delight our bones,
herbs cover us and grass grow over us,
and we shall lie quite still in alien homes
whatever flower or plough disturbs our rest
or root or weapon touch our spine with rust.

DAVID WRIGHT

Minster Lovell

A poem based on the legend of 'The Mistletoe Bough' and written for a ballet by Walter Gore

Now I a ghost ascend a broken stair
where no more the cold fingers of the rain
comb, or the winds caress my long brown hair,
I move among the populous passages
peopled with brown leaves and the sluggish weed,
and the wind's mutterings and memories
of sere wolds and the dark Atlantic seas.

Remembering now the dancing. I remember
voice of the harp, the tender
note of the flute, the tremble
of the low-toned clavichord;
the whisper of the dresses
as the dancers turned and parted,
as the music paused and started.
The dancers are departed.

Remembering now the dancing. O my lover
break down the cold embraces of the grave:
murder the time, recover
the lost words, the lost glances.

Now I a virgin ghost, under the cold
and lunatic moon, forsaken. Whom these walls
already have forgotten. Whom they hold.
In the dark rain of spring, in the cascade
of the clear pool that will not wet my feet.

O find me whom I fled
before the leaden pressure of the lid
weighs down the thin white arms and bended head.
Who only hears the voices on the stair
who cannot hear the dry grate of the lock.

I am bound in with darkness. In the iron
strong womb of time. The lover
clasped by a stronger, more enduring arm;
in a more proud embrace.

O find me. Find, recover.
Break down the cold embraces of the grave:
shatter these hasps, and scatter
eternal walls, and batter
with a white leap of light the night. Discover
the bright horizons.

I heard a footstep on an outer stair:
I heard a voice call once, and call my name:
I blinded in the tangle of my hair,
pressed in with darkness. Who will not recapture
the sunlight or the crocus, who will wander
in the moon's error and the winds, forgotten.
Virgin of the spring rains, among these walls.

Now I the ghost of a delighted bride
brought to a dark unrobing, and a bed
celibate, to surrender
a living virginity for a dead;
O this my pride, to tender
to the malicious worm my slender head.
Brown hair and white limbs, who will not remember?

I not await him. I await no lover:
who overtakes the still feet of the years?
And I have mouldered in the dust too long,
too long my being in the darkness fed.
Under the sallow moon I must await,
tenant of hollow winds and bitter rain,
the new birth of the crocus. None deliver.

And none return. The constellations wheel
westward; and westward the reluctant moon.
None shall burst down the indurate barriers;
none open wide the doors: and none return.
Westward the moon. Inhabitant of the spring,
the short grass and the broken palaces,
I meditate the winds and the cold rain.

CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON

Departure, for C.

And I came at last
to the burnt city of my soul
where in the streets lay
lolling alone the dumb
and dying birds. And no speech
was uttered over the dead. At last
I saw in the frigid clamour of my skull
no flowers breaking the black earth,
no voices cracking the silence.

O and if then I could found
where the desert blows its dust
a new city on my love, if I could
build up a white structure and
hold it as I have held you within
the mountains of my hands, the future
would grow as the laughter of faces,
white, full of questions, pointing
towards the magnetic hour of our love,
finding each question clear upon our lips.

If I could turn
into you now and know
your hair falling as a river
over my upturned face, O then
firm as our love in the landscape of our hearts
we could fold up our sorrow like a cloth
and build on the winds and sunlight we have known
a future immaculate as a star or a flower.

HENRY R. T. BRANDRETH

Pellinore

Sitting on a wind-strewn rock
By the sullen swish of a land-locked sea
With night beneath
Is sleep—and in the sleep the night's tide.

Out of the sea with giant-stride
Came Pellinore
Shaking the stars from his hair.
And the swish of the sea grew dim and cold
As he strode five continents away
Yet never drew apart;
While the sullen land by the sullen sea
Grew white with the light
Of his hair blown free
On the bareness of a heart.

Down the grey-lock'd years he went
Sweeping time with his ageless stroke,
As the sea grew small and the rock grew old
And the oceans sprang between.
As the rock grew older yet
And the sea still smaller grew
The great eternal Now was his
And the sleeper's sleeping tide.

L. V. HEBBLEWHITE

Brief Retrospect

I am provoked by a death: song still has
Occasions (think not otherwise), averted moments to accost and
Guide loth fingers to the tensile
Fountain pen. Dishevelled bard.

Apollo Citharoedus
Suckled by Muses twain;

The metal larynx in his hand
Breathes the melodious strain.

There is no dearth of propitiatory icons to solicit . . .
It is the choice that is bewildering
Which to make fast upon. At all events (do you say?) the burden
Fosters the sinew that must endure it. Lose the world?
Forsake the world? When daily
The aircrews are going out all over Europe.
Our acceptance is enforced. There is no surgery
To rig a living heart in flanks that are now of marble;
Sleek fingers that deeply chastised the bounding strings
Cannot attenuate the inert tone
By masterly adjustments.

Man must go hence.
Painstaking achieves only a conditioning to its own
Impotence; and our waking is inhedged by two assurances—
The collapse of sinew and the wane of seasons. Our
Strength is the illusory emphasis of
Shadows' intersection. Frailty that
Subtly eludes the scrutinizing lamp
And resents the laying on of hands.

A man destroyed—
Committed to those final distances
All must attempt, we say; pre
Posterous equipoise when it comes blunt
On youth. That smudges the unfixed negative and
Unsettles by the brief disclosure of a caged grimace,
Dividing darkness. Consider this: life, whether chance focus,
Fragile conspiracy of remote hazards,
Or (warm alternative) exultancy of godhead,
Life, in a moment,
Masterfully annulled.

There's perilous loitering;
Bring away thought to gentler pasturage,
Be suckled by the Lamb.
On the Sussex Downs.
Oo ja Oo ja Oo ja JA . . . Church of God,
Be studious to reveal your hairy knees, green tabs in your socks
And a lanyard appropriately grimed.

Christ had bleak thorns and peevish vinegar
And we not hell. That threat receded—and
Here (I think) every perplexity hangs
In unbiassed solstice—febrile belief
Evaporates, the fever shifting to graze on
Uncropped tissue.

Damned of that irrigation we walked
In climacteric, and our defeat
Cowered in the angle of the wall
Resenting summer—O flagrant moon
Why would'st thou gore me thus?—
Voices that were blithe diminished,
Querulous chirruping as the voices of
Mice, shrivelled voices that peep from the wainscot.
Orion comes. Shield me from murdering light.

Glance
Back once more along the radial vanishment of years,
And you will see, fixed, in perspective
A man, framed squalidly in the black gums of a door.
This is the exposthume of much wealth and peace
That breaks explicitly and is not remarked
To break.
From April we shrank
Coming as it did a green fever
On the earth.
May was implacable—
Gave us no respite but fantastically blistered the chaste hawthorn
In reefs, extravagantly.
June prominenced
The obscene rose, and with murmured dissensions, thinking
Sallow October a morose prurience
We upbraided winter.

You would insist a change? This is too soon. As yet
Thought branches among thoughts divide, grow less,
Inconclusive veindiscursive as the back of an old man's hand,
Gnarledry, unwilling to bud. Too bad
We are not burnished clients of the Son,
Done to a turn.

Secure
Refuge by reticence. The valued peace is
Itself the profit of an affected carelessness,
And that lissom vigilance that convinces
By the consolidation of a half-success
Must be our knack. Give me (Melpomene)
Eyes to admire the perfect routine of the tapdancer,
to fondle the leafhung spider's girdersilk,
And the surrendering sleep whose sufferance
Makes greeting of offence.

ROBERT RICHMAN

Night: Theme and Variations

For continual sun the clouds,
Infected red, expressed sorrow
With usual ease, and moved
Into this dark city where night
Is built by an old stonemason
Laying stone on darkness
And horror on stone. Under
The ceiling of night we are
Running to follow the shadows
Of gnarled men, which moving all
Like virus in a whirlwind,
Around the vaulted roof and walls
While we look for stars
In this small contrived sky.
And in the streets the whores walk by:
Seek no advice, teach love to those young men
Who watch them. "We shall soothe your
Fever, they say, with ice."
And they are gone, each to his own caress.
Walking between walls, these in protection
Of night ask nothing nor seek cause.
I never saw you before: yet on a journey
And having the flaws
I have, need a darker doom
For night. As mistress of revenge

You bring small flowers wearing dew
And arrange our seduction room:
And opening the door you
Await the trembling me.

NICHOLAS MOORE

Mr. Egisthus and the Merry Maidens

O I am trapped like an anaemic rat,
And I have no hope but this anaemia—
Weak blood. It is indeed the blood that's weak
Dreaming of distant islands in Aegea,
And the dark maidens on them and the gold—
They all belong to a forgotten day.

I only have this woman by my side,
This lean rake, this trumpet-nosed, this clever
Huntswoman, who was once so beautiful.
Now she has taken her another lover,
Better, more brave, more handsome, more romantic.
And yet she clings to me. My life is over,

Trapped, held in a vice: although I strive
To meet with mine these doelike, lovely faces,
I cannot do it. I am trapped and old
Already, and my body lies in pieces,
My mind is cut and chopped by this disaster.
I am not free for these young, fresh embraces.

O yes, I have romances in my bones,
Dreams, dreams . . . but they are thin and watery.
All I desired is turned to stone, stone-cold.
I am not made for brief and slick adultery,
But need to worship: yet, my goddess gone,
I crave and cannot have these young and merry

Beauties, these eyes so free. But not for me.
I turn again back to the mocking past.
It mocks me now always: that Love was thus;

The winged boy shot me and my heart was lost
Forever, and those joys, to disadvantage
Turned, now seem nothing but a grovelling beast's.

I never was cut out to be a hero.
Venus indeed must scorn my knotty brow.
Immersed from childhood in a sea of terrors
I should have known my marriage would allow
No hope, no joy, lacking that strength in me
To which I vainly turn and sadly now.

I should have written books and read of noble
Creatures, of Helen and of Troy, of brave
Ulysses and his journeys, and I should
Have made a purely fictive world of love
And with a dream princess lived in a village
Of stone roses, as many others live,

Free from the real world. Full of ancient wars
Long gone, and ancient heroes, then I would
Have so performed in my imagination
As to be happy. But I understood
So little, and I longed for what was real
Without discernment, thinking it was good.

Better to be a rat with a sharp tooth
And run in wainscots, hated by the world:
Better to be a swine and dig for roots
In the primaeval forests, running wild:
Better Egyptian eunuch than a man
Swayed by the innocent passions of a child!

And yet I am not a child. It is the child
Who destroys everything. I am destroyed
By naughty children, stupid selfishness
That loves and hates the thing it has betrayed.
It is not I who am the child, but she . . .
Yet it is I who am the one denied.

I crave the rose cheeks and the copper hair,
Or else I crave the dark mouth and the black . . .
My cravings all run wild—for what I have
Is what I want—yet from this raddled wreck,

What can I salvage? What I had was pure.
What I am left is virulent and dark.

O Helen, Helen. Those Nicean barques
Deceive, deceive. Surrounded by deception,
I am the rat who has no teeth to gnaw.
I cannot break beyond the daily captions
Of films, newspaper headlines. I am mad
With rage for what is true, the genuine rapture.

Yet it is passed, is gone from me. I lie
In a cold bed, beside a useless body
Whose beauty turns my heart to stone, whose limbs
As by a brook lie beautiful and shady;
The very image of desire: and yet
I dare not lift my hand to touch the lady.

Want what I do not want, love what I love
No more. I yearn for ancient mysteries.
O I am trapped and killed, slain many times,
No hero, and no robber. How it cries,
The bright child in my heart, for a new toy:
The maiden in the boat, her starry eyes!

N. K. CRUICKSHANK

The I's

The sum of these most resembles a hive.
Sink down your thought: listen to the tangled hum.

Here is one whose whole world is a mirror
Offering him the velvet approved hero
Of an intensely unique serial;
Whose food is the dutch-nectar of opinion.
Here is the sensual idler; and one
All thrusting spite. Another is wound up
To run in thin-lipped grooves backwards and forwards,

After fame, cash, or time. Nearer the centre
Are the ingenious talkative attendants:
The secretary the great reader,
The bard, the fool.

While O far down—
Deep as a mine, more legendary than royalty,
Having no use for clocks or books or mirrors,—
Lives a gentle and judging one who eats,
Sparingly, flower hues and the milk of stars.

This one is very lonely and always waiting
For the important visitor Death,
Who will come straight to her, waving the others aside.

SAUL GOTTLIEB

Home Is Where You Hang Your Hat

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child.
—American folk song

Who are the weak? Who are the strong?
Who are the peddlers fawning to our door—
tricksters with cushioned wares, with sleep?

In one of us you will find everything:
Scum itself is sometimes contained:
We are the weak. We are the strong.

Who sold us fables? Who cried mother?
Throning each home in accents of God—
Righting each wrong with haloes of fear?

And layer on layer, calling them ties:
Adding new burdens, telling old lies:
No focus at all, no sight, no eyes:

The strong are lean, are stripped of fat
united in purpose, advance above death
to eras of imagined springs, imagined peace.

REVIEWS

A LOST TALENT

DRUMMOND ALLISON, *The Yellow Night* (Fortune Press, 6s.); MAURICE LINDSAY, *No Crown for Laughter* (Fortune Press, 6s.); FRANCIS BERRY, *Fall of a City* and other poems (Fortune Press, 6s.).

I read all the poets of this phoney 'new Renaissance' with a yawn or a shudder; a yawn for Mr. Litvinoff, a shudder for Mr. Tambimuttu, a yawn *and* a shudder for Mr. Henry Treece: I was surprised to find the poems of a writer new to me, Drummond Allison, interesting, intelligent, and often exciting in their novelty and gaiety.

Mr. Allison's virtues are at present mostly negative: his poems are almost all pleasant to read, they lack the vices of romantic rhetoric, excess sensibility and vagueness which distinguish almost all poets now under thirty: yet there is no poem in his book which makes a complete whole, which has a beginning, an intention, and an end. This is because Mr. Allison's capacity for self-expression exceeds at the moment the value of the ideas he has to express, and because he has no immediately useful tradition in which to write. These first poems are full of bits and pieces, fresh and original phrases embedded in poems that don't say much after all. His fresh, fine imaginative quality, and a good deal of technical skill, is shown on every page: it is the central direction and intention that is lacking. Mr. Allison may be nothing at all: or he may, if he can find an appropriate body of ideas to write in, become a poet of importance. *The Yellow Night* is a good start, and is on any count worth reading. Here are some expressive quotations, of Marx:

> '*Who saw the soldier and the missionary*
> *As servants not of flags but the exporter,*
> *Who stood God with the phantom and the fairy,*'

of John Burns:

> '*The books the blackened buildings and the bridges*
> *You put your trust in keep their secret still;*
> *But the worm Unions have laid down a line*
> *That none decline however low the wages,*'

and of himself:

'*My mind like some forgotten frigidaire*
After a party empty and the switch
Still on.'

Mr. Lindsay's single virtue is a slight, pleasant rhythmical sense: but this is submerged in a flood of 'poetical' abstract language:

'*Naked, they knew the nadir of their souls*
lurked in the laughter of their treasured breath
where hour by hour, lust's feeble fumbling tolled
their sorrow's song, the anatomy of death.'

No. Mr. Lindsay needs a severe course of reading to purge him of mush: say a Dryden pill daily. And see p. 24:

'*I could be fifty times as foul a whore*
as any girl whose money is to please.'

Why, Mr. Lindsay!

Mr. Berry writes in language thicker and mushier even than Mr. Lindsay's:

'*Among the greedy hot street-dealings hear*
An echo of the wandering of Cain;
At sight of ocean waves dark chords will stir
That twang us back—aeons amphibian.'

I do not think it is necessary to say more than No to Mr. Berry. If Mr. Lindsay could be purged it is possible that within the mush one might find a small, hard pip of reality: Mr. Berry is mush all the way through.

. . . . . .

Since writing this review I have learned that Drummond Allison was killed last year in Tunisia. It seems appropriate to let the review stand untouched: but he deserved a better, more carefully selected memorial volume, and his death is a sad thing. We are not so rich in good poets that this talent could be spared.

JULIAN SYMONS

ARTURO BAREA, *Lorca, the Poet and His People*, translated by Ilsa Barea (Faber & Faber, 7s. 6d.).

At a time when young poets are striving to integrate into their verse the incongruous elements of modern civilization and more than ever are faced with the problem of their relationship to a political pattern, this book comes with the unique solution of one of the most interesting of modern poets.

Yes, Lorca's solution was unique, because it was unconsciously achieved.

No poet could have been more unpolitical than Lorca, and yet no poet, in modern times, has written verse that has proved so politically relevant. 'There is no direct political meaning in Lorca's work,' Barea writes. 'He emphasized, often enough, and rightly, that he had no politics.' But Lorca was saturated with Spanish life and tradition. His symbols and images, often obscure to the English reader, are vivid to Spaniards, because they fix sharp and clear inherent elements of Spanish life. So his poetry touched them 'with the full charge of their own half-conscious feelings, intensified and transformed through his art'.

Lorca is the complete justification of the poet's aloofness from politics. He realized that the significance of his work, because it sprang from the Spanish 'soul', could be (and, in fact, was) integrated into Spanish life, without his participation in politics.

Spanish sexual morality, with a complex hierarchy of conditions and taboos, gives much of the force to Lorca's imagery. Linked to this is the Spaniard's unusual attitude towards death, and this was the single preoccupation of the poet's work. He did not see death in the same way as Rilke saw it. ' He forced himself to face it in all its cruel finality, because with this knowledge life must be lived out courageously and gaily.' The civilization of death he discovered in America terrified him because he could see no way of living it out gaily as he could in Spain. This attitude towards death, with its sexual-religious basis, accounts for much of the significance of Lorca's imagery, a significance which perhaps has never been fully appreciated by most English readers because of its purely Spanish origins, but which, in this book, is made abundantly clear through a plenitude of carefully chosen quotations. The translations are literal and should be compared with the Spender-Gili translations, but, for the student, Spanish texts are given in an appendix.

I hope this admirably interpretative work will encourage some enterprising publisher to commission further translations of Lorca's poetry, because even if his work must remain somewhat alienated from an Anglo-American civilization that has cut itself off from the roots of poetry, it is a plangent call to unearth those roots that they may again grow a poetic tradition in our lives.

HARDIMAN SCOTT

JOHN MANIFOLD, HUBERT NICHOLSON, DAVID MARTIN, *Trident* (Fore Publications, 1s. 6d.); DAVID MARTIN, ed., *Rhyme and Reason* (Fore Publications, 1s.); PETER BAKER, *The Land of Prester John* (Resurgam Books, 2s.); REV. CAREY MORTON, *Windows and Whispers* (Arthur H. Stockwell, 2s.); REGINALD MORRIS, *Poems* 1944 (The Author, 1s.); ROBERT GREACEN, BRUCE WILLIAMSON, VALENTIN IREMONGER, *On the Barricades* (New Frontiers Press, 2s. 6d.).

Does it matter that in the six collections of new verse listed above the only poem memorable as a poem is one which every self-respecting reader knows inside out? That four of these books are so bad, their publication might be considered a criminal waste of paper? Not in the least: they can quite easily be ignored, and the reader is strenuously advised to do so unless, of course, he shares my delight in stinkers.

We stinker-lovers are having a beautiful time of it just now: wars, patriotisms, new-found faiths, Churchills, Stalins, Montgomeries, *et al.*, have an uplifting effect on Man, and Man is always itching to put the sensation of being lifted up into words, and that's how stinkers are born. Man dons battledress, and her versifies, dreams of blurbs announcing him to be the second Rupert Brooke at last or, if New-Writingly inclined, the second Cornford. Man used to be quite precious, but he discovered a political conscience on the twenty-first of June 1941, and so now he writes so-called Poetry With Guts, something the boys can sing as they march, something with lots of famous names in it to make them think: thus the odour becomes oppressive. Or, and this is admittedly nothing to laugh about, Man wants to put into words what has happened to him in Libya, on the Atlantic, over Essen, but simply does not know how.

Five of the six books under review—the exception is *On the Barricades*, and even that is no basis for arguing on behalf of the future of poetry—contain these and other varieties of stinkers—not the last-mentioned, however: fortunately for my conscience.

In *Trident* there is Mr. John Manifold illustrating in eight pages of excruciatingly thrilling rhymed couplets the majesty of a discovery he has made, namely, that '*the typewriter is mightier than the Bren*'. He does not, however, discuss the relative merits of the big ones, the medium ones and those teeny-weeny portable ones, but instead goes in for a spot of cribbing (I wonder, will the lines beginning '*To earn his keep a poet has to be . . .*' strike a familiar note for Louis MacNeice?), and what I imagine he imagines is

putting Stephen Spender in his place. To achieve this he takes us to the picture of himself as a grimy little boy sticking his tongue out at his elder and infinitely better almost straight from the typewriter-Bren imagery, as if on a revolving stage: hence the expression, revolutionary poetry.

Reading the contributions of Messrs. Nicholson and Martin, who complete the *Trident*, one realizes the aptness of the book's title: the three of them are indeed like prongs of a trident—smooth, shiny, with the points worn away. One may like their political attitudes or not: what is exasperating is the fact that all three can obviously write (except when Hubert Nicholson ends one of his stanzas:

> '. . . *shadows of men down the street mingle*
> *Round a cross the convoy sinuates towards.*')

but they have allowed other men's third-hand creeds to influence them to such an extent that their verse reads like the work of pupils of a correspondence school for poetry: slick, flat and phoney. And by this time we all know too well the names of men and places which inspired them: their constant reiteration means nothing to the reader and has long ceased to be the stand-in for stock emotions. Their total effect then, on me at any rate, is like Bertie Wooster's poem (in all but two words):

> '*Tum-tum-tee tum-tee tum tum tum,*
> *Fox Cornford tum tum tum.*'

Mr. Martin has edited *Rhyme and Reason*, which is certainly worth buying if one happens not to possess a copy of Yeats' 'Easter 1916', here included because it has *the revolutionary lilt*. Let that pass. My quarrel over this anthology, some of whose poets are quite presentable even in the company of Yeats—Drinan, McFadden, Pudney, Scarfe, Soutar—is with the editor's introduction. Mr. Martin has collected some poems he likes: all right—but who wants to know the pretentious reasons why he likes them? Someday somebody is going to edit an anthology without claiming tremendous importance for it, and to allow the reader to discover its message, if any, for himself.

Mr. Baker is a serious young man who can possibly do some good as a publisher, so long as his publications are better than this effort of his own, which shows him to be incapable of writing verse of the least interest to anyone. His military record is admirable —the blurb gives all the details—and the announcement ***First Impression January*** 1944 endearingly optimistic, but all the same,

Prester John's barren land will not arouse anyone's territorial ambitions.

The Rev. Carey Morton, Vicar of Beaufort (to give him his full title), shall speak for himself: it would be irreverend of me to compete with him:

> '*In the river I trace*
> *My reflected face.*
> *To the rock I shout,*
> *An echo comes out.*
> *In the moonlight I start*
> *At my counterpart.*
> *I have no trouble*
> *To find my double.*'

Mr. Morris, too, makes my job easy. He quotes James Agate's review of another book of his: *a civil little book from a civil servant's journal*, and I defy anyone to give a better description of his verse. As proof, this stanza from a poem called, believe it or not, 'Whirligigwise':

> '*Life seems quite a sacred jest;*
> *hunting heaven has lost its zest;*
> *stars prick through the mental fogs,*
> *only to get lost in bogs;*
> *milieu of a madman's dream!*
> *things are not quite what they seem!*

There remains *On the Barricades*, a rather different proposition. Robert Greacen and Valentin Iremonger have both published good poems in the past (I cannot remember anything of Bruce Williamson's), and that ought, I suppose, to be said in their favour. Iremonger here contributes an interesting long poem which, except in its third, bathetic part, always deserves attention: but if he expected the reader to do more than acknowledge his intelligence, he has failed, and leaves merely the pleasant memory of his 'Jezebel'. Greacen has clustered up most of his poems in this book with so much embarrassing *Klimbim* about the history of Ulster, Laments for France, Sense of Isolation in Contemporary Ireland, that they read like extracts from a B.B.C. script for the 'Irish Half Hour' or one of its 'Salute the Thingummy' programmes. Lines like:

> '*What do they say, Fritz?—what's this equality?*
> *So men are equal! The equality we respect*
> *Is that of the steel arm, the knuckleduster fist . . .*
> *That's* our *equality: Death to the Jews!*'

probably sound effective over the air, but seem to me to be neither sincere nor good poetry. Williamson, too, provides a mixture of a few beautiful lines and a mass of facile, careless writing.

This book is disappointing—even though it does not contain such downright rubbish as the other five—because it is sad to find poets of talent sitting smugly back on their little fame, forgetting to be critical of their work, playing games behind a façade of hysterical nationalism, undigested politics, and badly developed egoes.

ERNST SIGLER

THIS IS THEIR LANGUAGE TOO

WILLIAM EVERSON, 10 *War Elegies* (Untide Press, Waldport, Ore.); ALAN SWALLOW, *XI Poems* (The Prairie Press, Muscatine, Iowa); *Meanjin Papers; Quarterly* (Brisbane, Queensland); *Quartos*, Nos. 2, 3, 4 (Runa Press, Dublin); FREDERICK MORTIMER CLAPP, *Against a Background of Fire* (Harpers, New York, $2.50).

The Gettysburg address was delivered in an accent very similar to that used by many an allied soldier when inviting a friend to join him in a pint. This thought springs to my protection whenever I hear a middle brow being condescending about 'colonials'. For a native texture is threaded through these poems as the caraway seeds are in Jewish bread. Beauty is revolutionary, communism is goodness, whatever the accent that celophanes its expression.

Blessed are the humble for they inherit the review. Inside Cinderella's slipper I found the best verse. One only of these books, pamphlets and periodicals was not invited to the printing bench, but had to stay home and be duplicated and very nicely duplicated too. The sparrows and the hawks went to the feast, but the lark stayed home, he flys too high for the former and didn't wait for the latter. The 10 *War Elegies* of Mr. Everson are produced simply with great taste and cost the equivalent of our fivepence.

I shall certainly keep my copy, and hope that its author, far away on the lovely coast of Oregon, reads this review. These, it seems, are the first poems to be published, of a writer of deep culture and real ability. That quality of innocence which is a necessary ingredient to all real art is very present in William Everson's work. He writes:

'In the weak light
Under high fractured cliffs,'

and concerns himself with the ordinary people along America's Pacific coast, who

'Went out of the world
Into the war.'

These are the opening lines of his eighth and, to me, best elegy:

'All night long in the high meadow
They shielded the city light from
Their eyes under towering glass
Weeds warded them;
Dock hung in his hair
Mallow marred with its subtle stain
Her rumpled skirt.'

Readers please note: the next time they see a 'drunken' American, or any other, soldier with a girl, in the doorway of a closed shop, that it is just possible, that ideas like these are beating in harmony with the rhythm of his blood as his hand moves towards her hair.

Oh, I know that I shall be accused of falling for the homespun get-up of this pamphlet with the beautiful cover, against the 'vellum' of Mr. Clapp's two-and-a-half dollars, two-hundred page, New York publisher. However, if these necessary limited quotations have wetted the appetite of any reader, he may most certainly borrow my copy, but he must first promise, on the Leaves of Grass of Walt Whitman, to return it.

The *Meanjin Papers* is a new Australian Quarterly published in Queensland. It takes its title from the 'Abo' word for Brisbane, the State of Queensland is the California of the Commonwealth. Among the work of young Australian writers appear two poems of a too little known, ever here, Haitian Negro poet, Jacques Roumain. The two poems are worthily translated from the French. M. Roumain was imprisoned for two years by the Negro Government of the Republic, for editing his magazine 'Le Cri des Negres'. Toussaint L'Overture, to whom Wordsworth wrote one of his loveliest sonnets, was once president of this republic. Jacques Roumain tells his countrymen, in one of the poems published in this Australian Quarterly:

'That the whiteman that made you a mulatto
Is only a foamy flake floating
Like scum on the face of the river

The Irish Quartos contain some exciting new poems by Alex Comfort and Maurice James Craig. Whatever pattern post-war literature takes, the profiles of both these writers will be part of the picture. There is also some exceedingly dull writing by several English refugees (the second invasion, they are called in Dublin) who in escaping from history fled to an Ireland they had neither the taste nor the courtesy to visit before September, 1939. I wonder if it is known to those English writers who sneer at Ireland's position in this war, that the Eirean Government gave one hundred thousand pounds sterling towards alleviating the Indian famine. When men are starving the Irish are not neutral.

In Alan Swallow's *XI Poems*, one entitled 'Ode to Russia' contains these lines:

> '*This land of fear*
> *Has touched some trigger of our history.*'

Mr. Clapp's well-published and expensive book contains all the poems he wrote between 1938 and 1943. This book entitled 'Against a Background of Fire', is crowded with the competent leisurely verse of a present day metropolitan American who reads the literary press.

PAUL POTTS

HARRY LEVIN, *James Joyce* (Faber & Faber, 7s. 6d.); D. S. SAVAGE, *The Personal Principle* (Routledge, 10s. 6d.).

An outstanding example of the service 'little reviews' can perform for the serious writer who is always an artist and nearly always an exile among his own people, is the work of James Joyce. Mr. Levin's full-length study of him, first published in America, now made available to English readers by Messrs. Faber & Faber, will remain for a long time the most profound and illuminating commentary on the greatest literary figure of the 'entre deux guerres' generation. The book is tightly packed with interesting observations. One that struck me particularly, for example, was the spatial character of Ulysses in contrast to the temporal in Proust's work. One might add the flickering ever changing quality of the 'now' of Henry Miller, a writer who is for the present generation what Joyce was for a former one. Many people will disagree with this, but hasn't Joyce's reputation always suffered from the violent opposition of some sections of the

public. There have been no lack of attempts in some quarters already to revalue difficult writers like Joyce and Eliot to their disadvantage, but their position with that world public which, it is often forgotten, stretches over five continents and pays little attention to the small town politics of literary journalism, is definite and undiminishing. In a recent broadcast Mr. Frank O'Connor depreciated Joyce as a stylist in the line of Pater—horror of horrors these days of slipshod and boring realism, generally untrue to reality as an old photograph. Harry Levin's study is a critical work of very great value and authority which will have a good deal more weight with the public it is aimed at. Indeed, it is sad to think that with one or two exceptions English literary criticism today has nothing to offer on the level of this book.

In *The Personal Principle*, D. S. Savage has at least made an interesting contribution to contemporary criticism. The book is divided into two parts. The first is a series of essays concerned with establishing a general background, the second discusses the achievement of six poets—Yeats, Eliot, Hart Crane, Harold Monro, D. H. Lawrence and Auden. The patient reader should not be put off by the first essay, which attempts to clarify the classicism versus romanticism controversy. Mr. Savage's method seems to be to quote other people's confusions on the subject which never appears to be clear to anybody because nobody really knows the precise meaning of the terms. In fact, if the two publishers who have done most to promote the existence of good books in this country, T. S. Eliot and Herbert Read had not declared themselves severally protagonists of the classic and romantic, we should probably have heard very much less about it. To my own knowledge most writers detest the application to their work of meaningless labels. In a subsequent essay he emphasizes very rightly the modern creative writer's unofficial, subversive quality, his sincerity which makes him unable to take for granted the values of external authority. Apart from this golden statement the most interesting essay in the book was, to me, the one on the artist and his audience. He sees in the classless ideal audience for which the poet writes today which is drawn from society irrespective of economic and social status, a foreshadowing of the classless society of the future, a new social synthesis which is the complete antithesis of totalitarianism. God knows we hope so. And it may well be provided that behind the triumphant armies of democracy the men now enjoying a taste of power don't impose their own subtle brand of totalitarianism. It wouldn't be difficult with society organized as it is today.

Not many people will agree with Mr. Savage's estimates of Yeats

and Eliot. Nobody seems capable of giving us studies of these, the greatest poets of the preceding two generations. We feel the author would have done better to leave them to somebody of the calibre of Harry Levin. D. H. Lawrence he might well have left out of this book too. The studies of Hart Crane, Harold Monro and Auden are much more interesting, although one feels he is not quite just to the last who, in spite of suffering from an inflated reputation and being the idol of left wing bourgeois journalism, is a considerable poet and still young enough to do work of the first importance. In spite of its defects, this is a book well worth reading. There is little use in my advice to buy it at once. If you haven't done so already, there may not be any copies left in the bookshops.

WREY GARDINER

J. B. BRUNIUS and E. L. T. MESENS, *Idolatry and Confusion* (The London Gallery Editions, 2d.); TONI DEL RENZIO, *Incendiary Innocence* (An Arson Pamphlet, 1s.); DUNSTAN THOMPSON. *Poems* (Simon & Schuster, New York); HORACE GREGORY, *The Triumph of Life*, ed., (The Viking Press, New York).

Messrs. Brunius and Mesens have published at 2d. a letter they wrote to *The Tribune*, which that journal (why?) refused to publish. It is a protest against the idolatry lavished upon Aragon by Cyril Connolly and others an idolatry that does seem to be unjustified, and to have little to do with literature. But Messrs. Brunius and Mesens are somewhat clumsy in their humour and, though they seem to have a fair idea of what isn't wanted, they don't seem to have very clear ideas about what is—except M. André Breton, who, to make things more confusing, is rather an idol of theirs; and also, it seems, of Mr. del Renzio's. Though Messrs. Brunius and Mesens 'note in passing that Mr. Calder Marshall takes Mr. del Renzio for a surrealist. Another mistake.'

Mr. del Renzio, nothing abashed, has produced a very good-looking little pamphlet about surrealism, and he certainly exhibits a more positive attitude than his enemies. A great deal of what he says is, generally speaking, true: one does not doubt that there is considerable confusion in standards in poetry; but one does doubt if surrealism is quite the panacea that it is claimed to be, or that M. Breton is quite the major figure he would like to be thought. Nor has modern French poetry, be it Aragon's or Breton's or

Eluard's or anyone else's quite the monopoly in merit that Mr. del Renzio seems to think. Surrealism has contributed much to literary theory and more to painting, but it has not, unfortunately, produced very much good poetry, and I doubt if the future belongs so exclusively to it and its disciples, as any of these gentlemen imagine.

Dunstan Thompson's poems exhibit a liveliness such as, it would seem, Mr. del Renzio would applaud. Yet Mr. Thompson is no surrealist. Here, again, is a marvellous first book. It owes something to the example of George Barker, but it is none the less markedly original. There is a glitter of technique which is almost too good to be true, but it is! Technically, the poems are even more brilliant than Barker's. How one wishes this book had been published in this country rather than Karl Shapiro's. But there's no accounting for tastes!

The theorists seem to do very well until it comes to taste: then nothing fits. Horace Gregory's anthology is a good antidote. It is subtitled 'Poems of consolation for the English-speaking world', and it really is that. Mr. Gregory has made a rule of not including more than one poem by any contemporary writer, and, though this is arbitrary, it seems to work well. The poems of the living on the whole show up very well beside those of the more celebrated dead, and Mr. Gregory's individual choices are excellent; moreover, they really do illustrate his theme. There are, too, numerous surprising and excellent inclusions, surprising because they are usually overlooked or unknown; among them Lord Herbert's 'Elegy Over a Tomb', the very beautiful 'Lament for Our Lady's Shrine at Walsingham', and poems by Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, and Sarah Teasdale. How excellent, too, are Edwin Arlington Robinson's 'Luke Havergal' and the two poems by Philip Freneau (American, 1752-1832); how acute the selections from Housman and Herrick, which show them both in a much stronger light than the usual anthology selections. Mr. Gregory's eye is unerring in picking out those poems, and only those poems, which illuminate his theme. It is a pleasure to read so well integrated and considered an anthology. As a gesture against the prevalent idolatry and confusion, how nice (and surprising) it would be if one of our publishers had the good taste to bring out an edition of this book in this country!

NICHOLAS MOORE

LOUIS MACNEICE, *Christopher Columbus* (Faber, 6s. nett).

A critic's difficulty with Mr. MacNeice's *Christopher Columbus* is to bear constantly in mind its literary genre. It is easy to pick holes in it as poetic drama—only to find that the author in Preface and Appendix has disconcertingly anticipated most of the gibes and expressly insisted that the work is to be assessed solely as a radio play conforming to its own special technique. What constitute the chief elements of that technique are excellently, if sometimes a little obviously, summarized in 'Some Comments on Radio Drama', which form the Introduction to this book.

The author reminds us that radio drama 'appeals to the emotions rather than the reason, and requires a sensitive rather than an educated audience'. The radio script-writer cannot concern himself with the subtleties of so much modern sophisticated poetry—assonance, off-rhyme, rhythmic variation—which depends for its effect on the printed page or on being read to specialized audiences. Such subtleties get in the way alike of the composer setting a lyric to music or the producer of a radio drama: words alone are not the radio dramatist's concern, but only 'words-as-they-are-spoken and words-as-they-are heard'. In fact, the failure of so much radio drama is due to its being a far more primitive art than most of its practitioners realize. A careful comparison of this play with O'Neill's 'The Fountain' (an analogous theme) might do much to stress the valuable distinction between drama for the theatre and for the microphone. The nearest counterpart to the latter is, indeed, to be found not on the legitimate stage, but in the old ballads, or in the epics 'told sadly in song', where consecutive reasoning is at a discount, and vivid narrative in rhythmical language charged with emotion (i.e. poetry) is at a premium. For the latter type Mr. MacNeice, with his natural preference for Norse saga over modern novel and his feeling for the dramatic effect of the ballad and eclogue verse forms, is peculiarly fitted. But as a consequence those who think of him primarily as a poet and who look here for his latest development in that capacity will receive something of a shock: the poetry has become, to a great extent, 'mindless', and the rhythms have a straightforward crudeness that sometimes amounts almost to bathos—as in the play's ending. That, however, is to judge it out of its context, and to censure the author for what he did not attempt.

The story is one of romantic adventure—of Columbus's triumph over difficulty and his ultimate discovery of America. It is not a

tragedy; and that is why Columbus's last years of misery and downfall have no part in it. Again, it is a story of adventure and not sentiment; and that is why *l'affaire* Beatriz Enriquez is strictly subordinated to *l'affaire americaine*—she is only there as a pointer to the intrinsic unification of Columbus's character when the great project is at hand. The play, as we have it, moves with speed and clarity. It is not objectively impartial—Columbus's appeal to the Royal Commission is seen essentially through his eyes—but 'taking sides' is a legitimate and almost inevitable part of the historical drama game. Events separated by years are made swiftly to follow one another, and if Columbus's prolonged and anguished frustration is thereby obscured the dramatic effect is more than compensatingly heightened. Again, because the action and the central figure are everything, and his associates, friends, and opponents long since nothing but shadows, little attempt is made to differentiate them 'in their habit as they lived'. If history is thereby violated it is once more in the interest of the selectivity of art.

The sea-shanties and the 'Doubt' and 'Faith' choruses are excellently manipulated; but a word must be allowed on the music when this piece was translated from the page to the air. On page 18 Mr. MacNeice writes: 'Radio's other use of music is as a background to speech. This is very often messy.' It is. And, although he goes on to tell us that *Christopher Columbus* was conceived from the start as a joint literary and musical production, that did not save it from such messiness; in fact, the 'incidental' music was most unincidental, and was often obtrusive in the extreme.

Perhaps just because the broadcast of this play left us with some annoyance over these 'incidentals', and perhaps for other reasons, we have the feeling that here is a piece that conforms to nearly all the excellent injunctions in the recipe, and yet, somehow, just fails to come off as a memorable radio play. Here are two of the possible other reasons: first, that the general character of Columbus as portrayed is arrogant, overbearing, oblivious of close ties and alienating of our sympathy; and, secondly, that a poet whose verse has been distinguished by such subtle rhythms as those used in 'Carrickfergus' or—where witty vulgarity is unobtrusively subordinated to technical control—in 'Bagpipe Music', inevitably loses something pleasantly characteristic when he comes to write verse of the impersonal objective ballad type. This may, as he claims, be all for the good of broadcast drama; it cannot help so essential an individualist among poets as Louis MacNeice.

HERMANN PESCHMANN